DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 182 861 EA 012 501

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TITLE [Techniques to Improve the Educational Climate in Your School].
PUB DATE Jan 80
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (64th, Miami Beach, FL, January 11-15, 1980)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; Communication Skills; *Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; Interpersonal Relationship; Morale; *Principals; School Community Relationship; Students; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Morale

ABSTRACT

This presentation was based on the assumption that developing the art of making teachers and students feel good about themselves is of paramount importance in helping youngsters to learn. The author offers and elaborates on 12 tips to help principals improve school climate: (1) Be aware that the principal's most important function is getting people to feel good about themselves. (2) Establish a climate of professionalism in working with teachers. (3) Interact personally with children. (4) Be visible and get into the classroom. (5) Be a teacher advocate. (6) Be hospitable to teachers. (7) Be sensitive to teachers' suggestions. (8) Have a fund available fo finance small teacher or student projects. (9) Learn to give negative criticism in a positive way. (10) Be a politician when dealing with the community. (11) Capitalize on the strength of people by delegating responsibility. (12) Be human, have a sense of humor, and address unpleasant tasks with fairness, firmness, and dispatch. (Author/JM)

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TECHNIQUES TO USE TODAY TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL CLIMATE IN YOUR SCHOOL

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EA 012 501

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

My purpose for being here this afternoon is to share a few techniques and pointers that you may use to improve the climate in your school, beginning on the first day that you return from this convention.

The October, 1979 issue of the Phi Delta Kappan, reported on a conversation between Janet Ouston - one of four co-authors of Fifteen Thousand Hours, and a New York Times reporter, about the importance of the "Ethos" or tenor of a school in helping to create within children, a desire to learn. Need I ask who is being constantly cited in articles in a variety of educational journals as the person most responsible for the "Ethos" in our schools? Need I ask you who is being looked upon as the most influential factor in the success or failure of high schools to educate the youth of our nation?

The Montgomery School district, my employer, has become so sensitized to the importance of school climate on the ability of youngsters to learn, that they have made a substantial financial and moral commitment to that endeavor. They have, for example, invited Dan Jordan - from the University of Massachusetts - who some of you might recognize as the father of the ANISA Model, Jim Huge, the nationally known evangelist on school climate, and others to speak, work and interact with the entire faculty for no other reason than to emphasize the importance of climate on learning. I was encouraged to attend a week long "mountaintop" experience with ECA Associates in Aspen, Colorado this past summer. A colleague had a similar experience in Lubbock, Texas several weeks ago.

In addition, the district's superintendent, Malcolm Evans, coordinated the efforts of administrators and other staff in developing the Montgomery Model, an educational model that clearly outlines each professional's personal responsibility in facilitating the maximum transfer of learning from teacher to student.

I consider myself most fortunate to have had the opportunity to share in these learning exercises that, I hope, have made me a better principal. I also consider myself fortunate in that I work for a district that is truly interested in children and one who is constantly striving for perfection. If, however, I were asked to summarize in one sentence what I have learned from those experiences, I would say that developing the art of making people (teachers and students) feel good about

themselves, is of paramount importance if we are to expect our youngsters to learn.

I have come prepared to share pointers and techniques for establishing a positive educational climate, but before I do, I recognize that the people in this room represent a cross section of large and small schools and that some of you may work in schools in which you schedule sixty-five students for class, hoping that twenty-five will appear. To you, I say that it is the essence of this address and not all of the techniques that I'll be discussing that will be of most importance.

1. BE AWARE.....

Be aware that, as principal, your most important function is to make every student, every teacher, every person who works in or attends your school to feel good about himself. That is a tall order - but nothing, and I mean nothing, has more of an impact on the learning of youngsters than a teacher who loves his job and who loves coming to work each morning. Getting people to feel good about themselves is contagious; so is making them feel badly. If you are feeling low about something, do everything in your power to mask your true feelings. Your job is to make the people with whom you interact believe that every thing is coming up roses, even though weeds may be sprouting up all over the place.

2. ESTABLISH A CLIMATE OF PROFESSIONALISM.....

Interact with teachers on a professional basis. Look over your operating procedures for example, and throw out anything and everything that is "Mickey Mouse" in nature - including the sign-in/sign-out book. Most important, however, is to quickly identify and deal with those people who are inclined to be unprofessional in their performance. Responsible teachers wait to see how the principal will deal with those people who are inclined to be less than professional in the performance of their duties.

3. INTERACT WITH CHILDREN.....

The vice-principal and I stand at the main entrance of the school each morning to greet them as they arrive. You'll get a few surprised looks when you start the practice, but before long students will stop to chat about any number of things.

You will also be surprised at how much business you can conduct with teachers as they arrive for work.

Every student should know you by name and should be able to recognize you. They should be made to feel comfortable in asking you to solve a problem. Remove the mystique, if one exists, from the principal and his office,

4. BE VISIBLE.....

Most of us boast about our open door policy. Use that door to leave your office to see how the other half lives. Don't wait until it is time to make an observation to see what students and teachers are doing in class. In my opinion, one can learn more by rubbing shoulders with students and teachers in their own environment than in any other manner. Volunteer to teach a class in areas where you feel competent to do so. Encourage teachers to exchange classes (on a voluntary basis) for a day so they can feel what it is like to work in some other discipline.

5. BE A TEACHER ADVOCATE.....

Do whatever you can to diffuse any potential "Hatfield-McCoy" teacher-administrator confrontations that seem to have become in vogue of late. The importance of meeting the other fellow more than half way in conflict resolution cannot be over emphasized. If you do, you will soon find that you will have accrued a substantial sum in your credibility bank which will pay high dividends - particularly in times of crisis.

Give teachers and students large doses of TLC and you will get it back in triplicate. It wouldn't surprise me if you began to see an increase in teachers volunteering to do things for the school in an age where volunteering has become passe'.

6. BE HOSPITABLE.....

I provide the coffee and cake at an informal meeting that I hold in a faculty room once each week on a rotating basis. For example, this week I'll meet with teachers with a Period 1 "Prep". Next week with those have a Period 2 "Prep", etc. People are more prone to address concerns when they feel comfortable. Provide coffee at faculty meetings. A short coffee break before a long meeting tends to put people in a frame of mind to make contributions to the meeting, rather than to watch the clock to see when it is going to end.

7. BE SENSITIVE.....

Make a conscious effort to let teachers know that they are part of the decision making process and that their suggestions are of value. Don't worry! They'll leave the tough decisions for the principal to make.

8. FUND TEACHER/STUDENT ACTIVITIES.....

If possible, have a fund available to finance small teacher/student projects or activities. Most of us are inclined to throw bureaucratic roadblocks in the paths of those who ask for money (thereby stifling creativity).

9. AVOID PLAYING "GOTCHA"!.....

"GOTCHA" is a game played by some administrators and often lost by those same administrators, particularly when it comes to making teacher observations. Constructive criticism with the intent of improving instruction is always in order; but one must learn to say negative things positively.

10. BE A POLITICIAN.....

Invite the senior citizens into school for a luncheon once each month. We provide a luncheon for our senior citizens for a nominal fee. If they can't afford the luncheon, we "pick up the tab". We invite students to wait on tables, perform for the senior citizens, etc. Frankly, it is an enjoyable experience for all concerned and the practice contributes immeasurably to school climate.

Also, establish a community council made up of leaders of various community organizations. Invite parents into the building to assist with things that have to be done in the school, or to hear presentations made by teachers about various aspects of the curriculum.

If your parents don't come to you, go to them in their homes, particularly if you work in an urban school. Establish a rapport with the press so that they can report on the positive things that go on in school. Invite teachers and department chairmen to write feature articles about what they do in their respective departments.

11. CAPITALIZE ON THE STRENGTH OF PEOPLE.....

Delegate responsibility. Don't interpret this to mean giving the keys to the store away, but giving people a share of the action contributes a great deal toward positive school climate.

12. BE HUMAN.....

Most of us have a sense of humor or we wouldn't be doing this job. Be sincere and learn to laugh at yourself when you make an error. Address "unpleasant people tasks" with fairness, firmness and with dispatch.

The job of a teacher is to inspire students to learn. The job of a principal is to inspire the teachers to teach. I believe that competent teachers will respond more than adequately if given the opportunity to work in a positive climate.

Our national association says the principal is a "curriculum analyst, executive, interpreter, manager, mediator, ombudsman, scholar, strategist and a teacher of teachers". If he truly is a composite of all these things, it is imperative that he develop the skill of interacting with people on a positive basis.